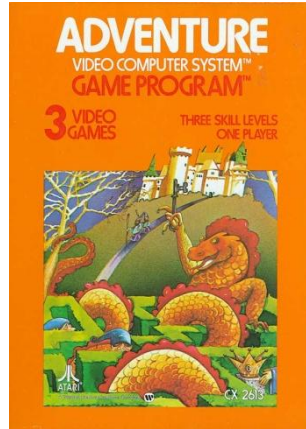




GAM0183 Game Programming

Laboratory 8

Playtesting using think-alouds with an observer.

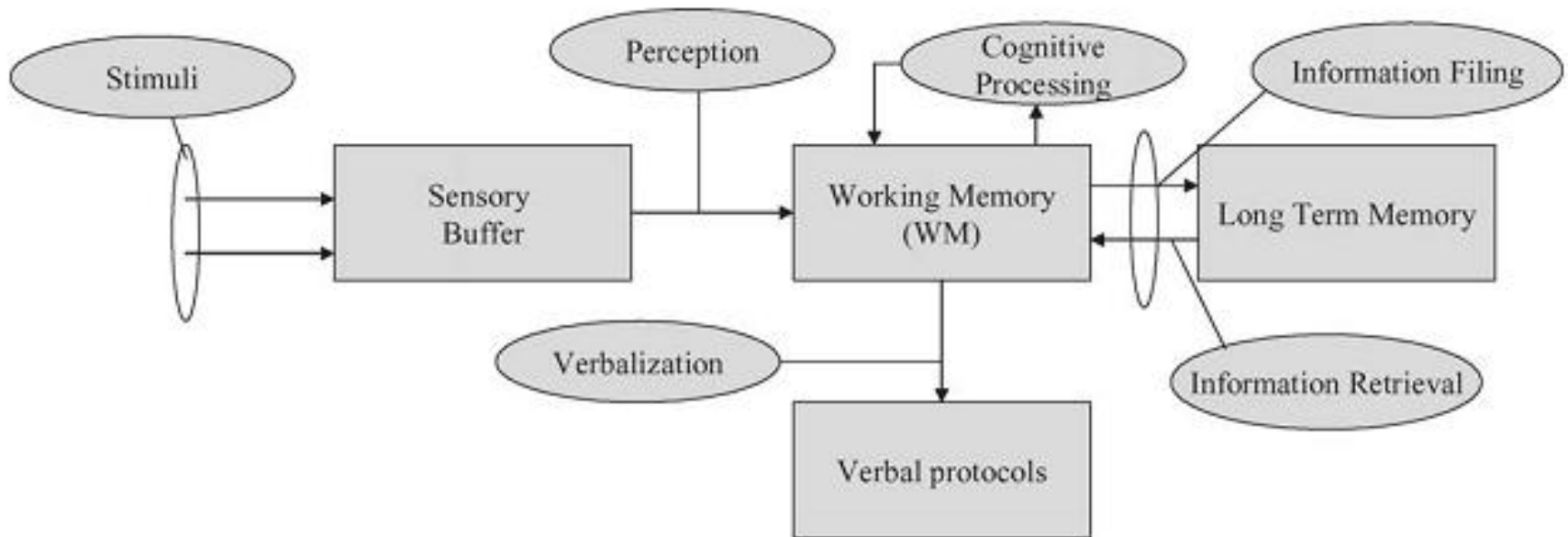
Playtesting

- Playtesting involves getting all kinds of players to play the game before release.
 - young and old
 - male and female
 - experienced and in-experienced gamers in general
 - experienced and in-experienced gamers in the game genre in particular e.g. interactive fiction
- The goal is to find ways of improving the game before it is released to the public (commercial or otherwise).
- Playtesting is not about finding bugs that will hang or crash the game at run-time.

Playtesting

- Everything the player tries can be recorded and analysed afterwards. This can be very time-consuming.
- After playing the game, the player can be asked to complete a detailed questionnaire about the game.
 - The player could be asked to rate each of the puzzles for enjoyment. If a puzzle rates badly, it can be removed or redesigned.
 - The player could be asked about ways to improve the game.
- The player can be observed playing the game and notes made of any difficulties experienced solving a puzzle.
 - Perhaps a clue is missing or so obscure that the player cannot work out how to solve the puzzle.
- The player can be directly observed playing the game and encouraged to think out their thoughts aloud.
 - Think-alouds can make it easier to identify a difficulty.

A simple model of the human cognitive system

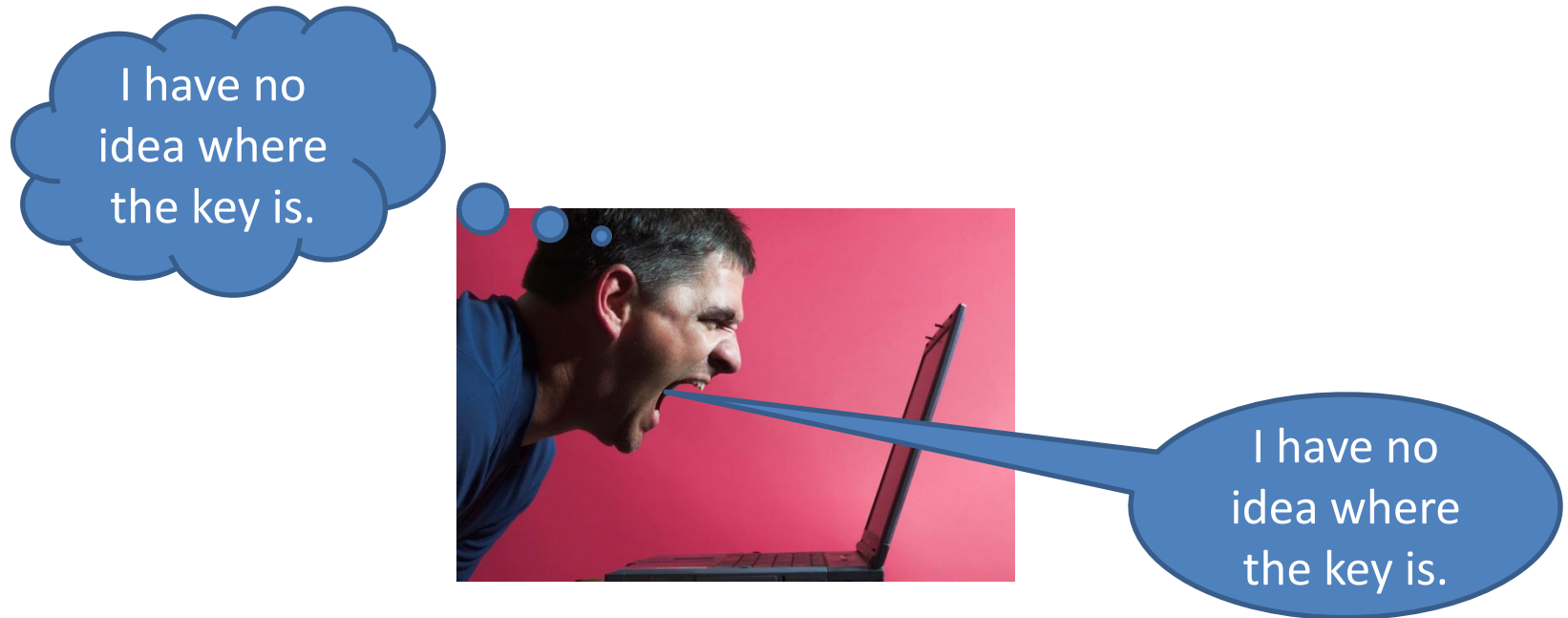


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When playing a game, players' usually keep their thoughts to themselves. The technique of think-aloud involves encouraging the player to think their thoughts out aloud.

The advantage of think-alouds.

- Data is gathered from short-term memory rather than long-term memory.



Playtesting using think-alouds with an observer.

instructions for the observer

- The basic instruction to the player is: “Tell me what you are thinking as you play the game.”
- Tell the player: “The aim is to find ways of improving the game. You are not being evaluated.”
- If the player falls silent, issue a reminder: “Tell me what you are thinking.”
 - Issue a reminder after 60 seconds of silence.
 - Issue a reminder if the player laughs, gasps, smiles, or frowns, but does not say anything.
- Try to avoid intervening. Intervene only as a last resort to keep play progressing for the available playtest time that remains.
 - Make a note of the difficulty that prompted the intervention.

Playtesting using think-alouds with an observer.

instructions for the observer

- Note the difficulties experienced by the player.
 - In an interactive fiction, is the player spending too much time trying to guess the right word to use?
 - Solution: provide more synonyms.
 - In an interactive fiction, is the player spending too much time trying to interact with an NPC who is a central figure in the story.
 - Solution: provide more interactivity with the NPC.
 - In an interactive fiction, is the player spending too much time following a red-herring?
 - Solution: remove the red-herring.

Problems using think-alouds with an observer.

- Players do not naturally think-aloud.
- Players can be distracted both by the process of think-aloud and by the presence of an observer.
 - Players may not play the game as they would normally.
- Observers may not be able to understand some things players say.
 - Observers must not enter into clarification dialogue.
- Observers can begin to help players by giving them advice about how to solve puzzles.
 - Observers must not help players solve puzzles.